

REMARKS

Reconsideration of this application, as presently amended, is respectfully requested. Claims 1-3 and 13-19 are now pending in this application, new claim 19 having been added by the present Amendment. Claims 1-3 and 14-18 have been allowed. Claim 13 stands rejected.

Claim Rejections – 35 U.S.C. § 102

Claim 13 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by **Shuzo** (JP 06-143073). For the reasons set forth in detail below, this rejection is respectfully traversed.

The Examiner provides a thorough discussion of the **Shuzo** reference on pages 2 and 3 of the Office Action. In summary, the Examiner considers the plate 1 and the tabular porous ceramics layer 3 to correspond to the claimed “vacuum chuck table” and “porous plate,” respectively. Further, although it is somewhat unclear, the Examiner may consider the various adsorption sections 4a, 4b, 4c to be “concentric suction grooves” (see Fig. 3). The air holes 8a, 8b, 8c are considered to correspond to the claimed “plurality of suction passages,” and the portions where the air holes 8a, 8b, 8c connect to the suction adsorption sections 4a, 4b, 4c appear to be considered the claimed “more than one hole on the porous plate.” Finally, the Examiner asserts that because each of the passages 8a-8c are connected to separate inlets 7a-7c, it is conceivable that the suction force could be introduced into the suction passages at different timing.

The important feature of claim 13 is to sequentially introduce a suctioning force into a plurality of suction passages at different timing. Specifically, a suctioning force can be

introduced first to some suction passages located near a center portion of a wafer so as to cause the center portion of the wafer to closely contact the vacuum chuck table. Then, a suctioning force is introduced to some suction passages adjacent to the suction passages, which correspond to the center portion of the wafer and closed by the contacted portion of the wafer. This causes a portion of the wafer corresponding to the suction passages, to which the suction force is introduced, to closely contact the vacuum chuck table. By sequentially introducing the suction force into some of the suction passages from a center portion toward the periphery of the wafer, the entire wafer can be finally contacted with the vacuum chuck table even if the wafer has a large bowed shape or arched shape.

It is respectfully submitted that the **Shuzo** reference discloses a plurality of suction grooves, but does not disclose the suction device for sequentially introducing a suctioning force at different timing. The invention recited in claim 13 provides the advantage of allowing the suction of an entire wafer, even if the wafer has a large deformation.

Further, a rejection under §102 requires that *each and every element* recited in the claim must be disclosed in the prior art reference. With this in mind, it is noted that in the rejection, the Examiner states “*the suction passages disclosed [are] conceivably able to allow the suction force into the suction passages at different timing even if it is not optimized for this purpose*” [emphasis added] (see Office Action, page 2, lines 11-13).

The standard under §102 is not that the reference might allow (“conceivably able to allow”) the prior art system disclosed in the reference to be adapted to meet the structure and function of the claimed invention. The standard under §102 is that every claimed element must

be disclosed in the prior art reference *exactly as claimed*. It is respectfully submitted the **Shuzo** reference does not disclose or suggest the claimed “suctioning device for sequentially introducing a suctioning force into the suction passages at different timing.” Thus, **Shuzo** does not disclose the claimed “suctioning device” exactly as claimed, and therefore the rejection under §102 is improper and should be withdrawn.

Therefore, in view of the above remarks, it is respectfully submitted that claim 13 patentably distinguishes over the **Shuzo** reference and therefore defines allowable subject matter. Reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection under §102 are respectfully requested.

New Claim

New claim 19 has been added by the present amendment. New claim 19 recites a method of fixing a semiconductor wafer to a vacuum chuck table in a manner similar to apparatus claim 13. More particularly, new claim 19 defines a step of sequentially introducing a suctioning force to suction passages toward the periphery of a vacuum chuck table. As noted above, **Shuzo** do not disclose or suggest the claimed sequential introduction of a suctioning force to suction passages. Therefore, new claim 19 also distinguishes over the cited prior art.

CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing amendments and accompanying remarks, it is submitted that all pending claims are in condition for allowance. A prompt and favorable reconsideration of the rejection and an indication of allowability of all pending claims are earnestly solicited.

Application No. 09/577,932
Group Art Unit: 2815

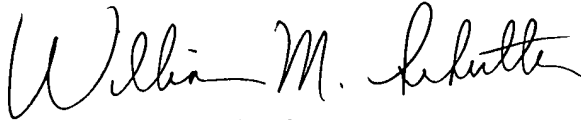
Amendment under 37 C.F.R. §1.111
Attorney Docket No.: 000663

If the Examiner believes that there are issues remaining to be resolved in this application, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned attorney at the telephone number indicated below to arrange for an interview to expedite and complete prosecution of this case.

If this paper is not timely filed, Applicants respectfully petition for an appropriate extension of time. The fees for such an extension or any other fees that may be due with respect to this paper may be charged to Deposit Account No. 50-2866.

Respectfully submitted,

WESTERMAN, HATTORI, DANIELS & ADRIAN, LLP

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William M. Schertler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "William" being the most prominent.

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